



249TH FIRST FLAG RAISING

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2025 • SOMERVILLE, MA

PRESENTED BY THE SOMERVILLE MUSEUM, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CITY OF SOMERVILLE



Courtesy of Harper's Weekly

Copyright by Harper & Brothers.

RAISING THE FIRST AMERICAN FLAG, SOMERVILLE, MASS., JANUARY 1, 1776



MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

FLAG RAISING PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2025 • SOMERVILLE, MA

11:40 – Procession departs City Hall

George and Martha Washington followed by Local dignitaries and Mayor Ballantyne; Phillis Wheatley; Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company (AHAC); Prescott's Battalion; His Majesty's 10th Regiment of Foot; Charlestown and Rhode Island Militia; Members of Glover's Marblehead Regiment & Rhode Island Militia; members of the public

12:00 – Program at Prospect Hill Park

	Welcome	Jake Wilson, Councilor at Large
	Opening remarks	Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
12:10	Invocation	Rev. Samuel Langdon (Henry Cooke)
	Historical Introduction	CPT Rick Young, Charlestown Militia COL Richard Sheryka, Kentish Guards Rhode Island Militia under General Nathaniel Greene
12:20	Instrumental interlude: Chester	Prescott's Battalion
	Historical Context II	COL Paul O'Shaughnessy, HM's 10 th Regiment of Foot (King George's delegate)
	Sing Along: Yankee Doodle	Prescott's Battalion
12:35	Historical Context III	COL (MA) Lawrence A. Willwerth, Commander of Troops
12:40	Greetings from Martha Washington and Phillis Wheatley	Martha Washington (Sandy Spector) and Phillis Wheatley (Cathryn Philippe)
12:55	George Washington's Order	Presentation by General George Washington (Glenn Siner) and Honors to the Grand Union Flag
	Unfurling of the Unit Flag	Charlestown Militia and Ancient & Honorable Artillery Company
1:00	Closing acknowledgments	COL (MA) Lawrence A. Willwerth, Commander of Troops

Make sure to visit the museum's merchandise and activity tables, with flags to decorate, gifts from the museum for purchase, and complimentary hot drinks!

THE FIRST FLAG

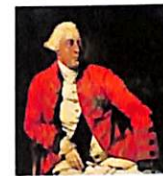
By December 1775, the Siege of Boston had dragged on for 8 months with no clear outcome. (For more details about the Siege of Boston, scan the QR code at right.) Winter had arrived, morale was low, and soldiers had not been paid. The future of the Continental Army, especially as enlistments were ending, seemed uncertain.

To unite the colonies, General Washington requested a new national flag, which was authorized by Congress in December 1775. The first flag, known as the "Great Union Flag," combined the British Union Jack with 13 alternating red and white stripes, symbolizing the 13 colonies.

Siege of Boston:



General William Howe, Commander HM Forces, Boston



HRM King George III



General George Washington, Continental Army Commander



Brigadier General Nathaniel Greene, Prospect Hill Commander

On January 1, 1776, in response to King George III's declaration of war, Washington ordered the new flag to be raised on Prospect Hill. This bold act signaled the colonies' determination to remain independent.

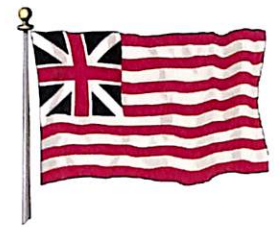


Plate 3b. Illustration of the Grand Union flag featuring the British Union Jack and thirteen red and white stripes symbolizing the union of the American colonies. Considered the "first flag of America," the Grand Union was first displayed on the Continental Navy's flagship, Alfred, on 3 December 1775 and was in use until late 1777. Courtesy of Duane Streufert for USFlagDepot.com

The flag's display was visible to the British garrison in Boston and reinforced the colonists' resolve. By the end of the month, General Washington had received cannons from Fort Ticonderoga, which, combined with the new fortifications and the Continental Army's renewed spirit, led to the British evacuation from Boston in March 1776—the first American victory of the Revolution.

The "Great Union Flag," later called the "Grand Union Flag," became a symbol of independence, displaying the 13 stripes of the colonies with the British Union Jack in the corner.



Downman (1685)



Lens (1700)



Rees (1820)



Leun (1842)



National Geographic
(1917)



Prior to the Acts of Union which created the Kingdom of Great Britain, the flag contained the St. George's Cross in the canton representing the Kingdom of England

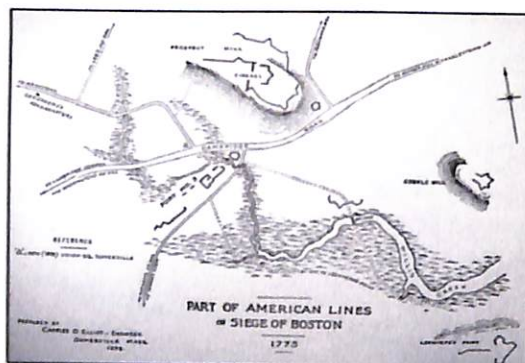


The flag had a Union Flag in the canton after the creation of the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707.



After 1801, the flag contains the Union Flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in the canton. (1810)

In 1896, a tablet was erected at the corner of Munroe Street and Prospect Hill Drive to commemorate the first flag raising. In 1898, Charles D. Elliot, formerly a city engineer, traced the outline of the fortification at Prospect Hill and vicinity. The image on the left below shows Prospect Hill in 1775, and the image on the right shows the area today. *Suggested further reading: "A History of the Hill" by William Preble Jones, April 11, 1896.*



Yankee Doodle Lyrics

Chorus:

Yankee doodle keep it up,
Yankee doodle dandy,
Mind the music and the step
And with the girls be handy

BEGIN:

Father and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Gooding,
And there we see the men and boys
As thick as hasty pudding.

Chorus

And there we see a swamping gun,
Large as a log of maple,
Upon a ducid little cart,
A load for father's cattle.

Chorus

And every time they shoot it off,
It takes a horn of powder,
And makes a noise like father's gun,
Only a nation louder

Chorus

And there was captain Washington,
And gentlefolks about him,
They say he's grown so tarnal proud,
He will not ride without them.

Chorus

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS CONTINUED

Please see the back of the program for acknowledgements to the City of Somerville. See below for today's volunteers, interpreters, musicians, speakers, and partners. Thank you to everyone involved!

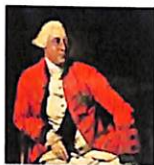
- Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
- Jake Wilson, Councilor At Large
- Current city councilors in attendance
- COL Lawrence Willwerth
- COL James McGinn and the Bedford Militia
- COL Richard Sheryka and COL Theo Aschman of the Kentish Guards, Rhode Island Militia
- COL Joanne Breslin of the Varnum Continentals, Rhode Island Militia
- COL Paul O'Shaughnessy and HM 10 Regiment of Foot
- CPT Rick Young and Gardiner's Regiment, Charlestown Militia
- Members of Glover's Marblehead Regiment and Sudbury Militia
- Ancient & Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts
- FoodLink MA
- DeMoulas Market Basket
- Dunkin' Donuts / Watermark Donut Co.
- Gary Bunker
- Marie Powers
- Gene Brune
- Evelyn Battinelli
- Bob Bean
- Sally Chetwynd
- Henry Cooke
- Therese DiMuzio
- Melissa Gay
- Greg Jenkins
- Betsy Ketudat
- Mary Mangan
- Stephanie Marlin-Curiel
- Cathryn Philippe
- Gerald Pierce
- Kathleen Pondelli
- Glenn Siner
- Sandy Spector
- Dana Westover
- Tom Vandervort

Excerpts from His Majesty's King George III Most Glorious Speech
to both Houses of Parliament On Friday, 27 October 1775

"My Lords, and Gentlemen,

Those who have successfully labored to inflame my people in America by gross misrepresentations, and to infuse into their minds a system of opinions, repugnant to the true constitution of the colonies, and to their subordinate relation to Great-Britain, now openly avow their revolt, hostility and rebellion. They have raised troops, and are collecting a naval force, and they have seized the public revenue.

Many of these unhappy people may still retain their loyalty, yet the torrent of violence has been strong enough to compel their acquiescence, till a sufficient force shall appear to support them.



The authors and promoters of this desperate conspiracy have meant only to amuse by vague expressions of attachment to the Parent State, and protestations of loyalty to me, whilst preparing for a general revolt. On our part, the resolutions of Parliament breathed a spirit of moderation and forbearance. I have acted with the same temper; anxious to prevent the effusion of the blood of my subjects; and the calamities which are inseparable from a state of war; still hoping that my people in America would discern the traitorous views of their leaders. To be a subject of Great Britain, with all its consequences, is to be the freest member of any civil society in the known world.

The rebellious war now levied is become more general, and is manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent empire. I need not dwell upon the fatal effects of such a plan. The object is too important, the spirit of the British nation too high, the resources with which God hath blessed her too numerous, to give up so many colonies which she has planted with great industry, nursed with great tenderness, encouraged with many commercial advantages, and protected and defended at much expense of blood and treasure.

When the unhappy and deluded multitude shall become sensible of their error, I shall be ready to receive the misled with tenderness and mercy! To remove as soon as possible the calamities which they suffer, I shall give authority to grant general or particular pardons and indemnities, and to receive the submission of any Province or Colony which shall be disposed to return to its allegiance, as if such Province or Colony had never revolted."

George R.

General Howe directed that copies of the "King's Speech" be distributed to the Rebel lines on Monday, January 1st 1776. General George Washington directed the "Great Union" flag to be raised at the most visible point, Prospect Hill.

"HIS EXCELLENCY GEORGE WASHINGTON"

In the fall of 1775, **Phillis Wheatley** (c. 1753–1784) wrote to George Washington, enclosing a poem of admiration for him. He replied months later, noting that he had received her correspondence in mid-December, just weeks before he ordered the Grand Union flag to be raised at Prospect Hill. It is not unreasonable for us to imagine that Wheatley's words of encouragement rang in Washington's head as he ordered the flag to be raised!



Today, we are excited to welcome Cathryn Philippe as Phillis, who will share an excerpt from the poem that she sent to Washington. For the full poem, as well as a short biography of Phillis, see somervillemuseum.org/museum-blog.

P. Wheatley to G. Washington - 26 October 1775

SIR,

I Have taken the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will pardon the attempt. Wishing your Excellency all possible success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in. I am, Your Excellency's most obedient humble servant,



Phillis Wheatley.

G. Washington to P. Wheatley - 28 February 1776

Mrs Phillis,

Your favour of the 26th of October [1775] did not reach my hands 'till the middle of December. Time enough, you will say, to have given an answer ere this. Granted. But a variety of important occurrences, continually interposing to distract the mind and withdraw the attention, I hope will apologize for the delay, and plead my excuse for the seeming, but not real, neglect. *[continued on next page]*

I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant Lines you enclosed; and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyric, the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical Talents. In honour of which, and as a tribute justly due to you, I would have published the Poem, had I not been apprehensive, that, while I only meant to give the World this new instance of your genius, I might have incurred the imputation of Vanity. This, and nothing else, determined me not to give it place in the public Prints. If you should ever come to Cambridge, or near Head Quarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favoured by the Muses, and to whom nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations. I am, with great Respect, Your obedt humble servant,

G. Washington

"NEWNESS IS UPON US ALL"

BY SANDY SPECTOR

Martha Washington played a vital role in our country's founding. The General's Lady traveled each winter during the Revolutionary War from their home in Virginia, to wherever winter camp may be that year, beginning with Cambridge Camp in December of 1775 through Newburgh, NY in Summer of 1783. It has been calculated that Martha spent more than half of the war with General Washington and the Continental Army.

Even though their favorite place to be was under their own vine and fig tree at Mount Vernon, duty always took precedence over the Washingtons' desire to remain at home. When General Washington became President Washington in 1789, Martha followed her husband once again to serve the country - for another 8 years. It was through her efforts that societal protocols were created that set the foundation for the presidents and first ladies who followed.

Today, please enjoy a short address entitled "Newness is Upon Us All" by Martha Washington Interpreter Sandy Spector. With the new year upon us, Mrs. Washington joins us to share her thoughts on how it is not just a new year for her. Everything is new - war, travel, households, and people! What does she think of Cambridge and of her new home in Headquarters?

To learn more about Sandy Spector or to invite her (as Mrs. Washington) to visit, please reach out through www.themrswashington.com or on Instagram at @martha_washington_visits.

To learn more about Martha Washington, please visit Mount Vernon's website: <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/martha-washington>



Pyle, Howard. (1890). Lady Washington's arrival at headquarters, Cambridge, 1775 [Painting]. Retrieved from <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/c247gg94g>

YANKEE DOODLE SING-ALONG

Thanks to Prescott's Battalion for lending the information below, and providing today's musical accompaniment. For lyrics, see the insert.

What are the Real Words to "Yankee Doodle?"

The lyrics that George Washington probably heard sung to the tune of "Yankee Doodle" are not the words now known around the world. The earliest known appearance of the common words relating to "pony, feather, and macaroni" is in James Orchard Halliwell's *The Nursery Rhymes of England*. No earlier reference to these lyrics has been found. Washington probably did know the chorus about minding the music and the step. It comes from the Boston area in 1775 and was set to the tune we all know. The song must have struck home because by 1830, over one hundred more topical lyrics were printed, sung to the same tune and using the same basic chorus. In the twentieth century, this chorus was added to the "macaroni" verse from 1842, making up the song we know today.

Sources

1. James Orchard Halliwell, *The Nursery Rhymes of England* (London, 1842), p. 82
2. Transcribed from a broadside in the Rosenbach Collection in Philadelphia, illustrated in Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Music for Patriots, Politicians, and Presidents: Harmonies and Discords of the First Hundred Years* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), p. 61.
3. *The Dance. A Ballad, to the tune of "Yankee Doodle."* Pennsylvania Packet, November 27, 1781.
4. *Commercial Advertiser*, June 29, 1798.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hope that you enjoy this morning's First Flag program. This annual event was originally developed by the staff of the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and is now produced by the Somerville Museum in collaboration with the City of Somerville. We would particularly like to acknowledge the support of the Mayor's Office and Communications Department, City Council, Department of Public Works, the Somerville Police Department, Somerville Traffic and Parking, SomerViva, Somerville MediaTV, OSPCD, and the Somerville Arts Council.

In addition to the city groups above, we would like to thank the individual volunteers, advisors, military members, and historic interpreters listed on the insert.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

For more information about the Somerville Museum, including volunteer opportunities, events and exhibits, and upcoming 250th commemorations, visit somerlevmuseum.org.

For additional historic information and details about the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission, visit somerlevma.gov/departments/ospcd/historic-preservation.



YOUR NEIGHBOR IS A MUSEUM

...and we re-open on January 16th! Visit us:

Somerville Museum
1 Westwood Road
Somerville, MA 02143

